
THE MISERABLE PLIGHT OF BAKHA IN ANAND'S *UNTOUCHABLE*

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Abstract:

Mulk Raj Anand (1905) is one of the most highly regarded Indian novelists writing in English. He is a writer with an axe or many axes to grind and he also labelled as a humanist more than a Marxist. His main concern has always been for the creatures in the lower depths of Indian society, the neglected and the down-trodden sections. He has become a voice to articulate their anguish. As Anand's novel *Untouchable* (1935) deals with the miserable plight of Bakha, the present paper makes an attempt to show how Bakha is suffered and ill-treated. In *Untouchable*, Anand creates a character who is seeking identity for himself in a world which has neglected and suppressed his kind for ages together. Bakha occupies the centre of stage throughout the novel and there is not any attempt to idealise him as he is a type and an individual

Keywords: untouchable, neglected, suppressed, individual, etc

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Bakha is a proud and abled young man. He is the son of Lakha, and his brother Rakha and his sister Sohini. The death of his brother throws the entire burden of looking after his family into his shoulders. So Bakha's life never knows comforts and luxuries. His day begins with the abuses by his father to attend and clean the latrines. Though Bakha's job is dirty, he remains comparatively clean. When the chimney has consumed the last basket of

straw and refuse, Bakha closes his mouth and retreats. Now, he feels thirsty and the edges of his lips are dry. His thirsty becomes over-powering as he enters the room and finds his sister Sohini struggling to fire the oven. Then she rushes out to fetch water to make tea for her brother. But Sohini's love on her brother depends on a kind hand to fill her pitcher with water because the out castes are not allowed to mount the platform to draw water from well, if so the upper castes consider the water gets polluted. There, Gulabo, the washer-woman who herself feels superior to every other caste is jealous of Sohini's fair complexion. Gulabo's unnecessary abuses disappoint Sohini, whose heart feels for her brother's thirsty as a mother longs for her loved child. Sohini's waiting is illumined/ lasted as there comes Pandit Kali Nath, an ill-humoured old devil.

The Pandit recognizes the fresh young form, Sohini, as the sweeper Lakha's daughter. Disillusioned by the congenial weakness of his mind, the Pandit exercises over the faithful and devout as he is inclined to be kind to her. By doing the favour of pouring the water into her pitcher, he asks Sohini to come and clean the courtyard of his home at the temple. As he scheduled, she is at work at the temple, the lust-stricken Brahmin tries to molest her by holding her breasts. Knowing the dishonor attempted at her sister, Bakha rushes blindly towards the courtyard, 'The Son of a pig! I will go and kill him!'(55). Commenting on Bakha's fury, Balaram S.Sorot writes, "Agitated by the insult, Bakha wants to kill the priest for attempting to dishonor his sister" (58-59).

Many episodes in the novel mirror the agony and disapproval of Bakha who receives first hand humiliation and denied as an out-caste untouchable. Bakha, after completing his day work, is walking along with the thoughts of Joy of a new hockey-stick promised by Havildar charat Singh. His mouth is watering to unfold the Jelebis thrown at him by a confectioner. But he does not taste the jelebis instead tastes an ill-treatment by a caste- Hindu. All his joys are swept away swiftly by the air of 'touch', 'keep to the side of the road, you, low-caste vermin! Do you know you have touched me and defiled me, you cockeyed son of a low-legged scorpion!'(38). Indulging in the little happiness of getting jelebis, Bakha forgets to call out, "posh, posh, sweeper coming!"(42). As a result, the public abuses him and the man slaps him for going beyond his limits. Bakha stands still, amazed, embarrassed and his senses are paralysed. Soon crowds gather around him jeering and teasing without a shadow of pity until a Muslim tangawallah comes to rescue him one untouchable has come to rescue another untouchable.

Mortified by the experiences, Bakha goes into rage as his feelings rise like spurts of smoke from a half-smothered fire. The picture of the touched faces gets him agitated. He is smorting under it and is angry with himself, "Why was all this? Why was I so humble? I could have struck him!"(42-43). Bakha wants to violate the caste system and the social injustice done to the untouchables, yet he fails to rise to the occasion due to his inheritance of servility from his ancestors. He seems like a tiger but caged one. Analyzing the

condition of Bakha, Balaram S.Sorot feels, "He is caged in the conventions of society" (60). Bakha's anger blows away and the slave in him makes up and realizes, "For them I am a sweeper, sweeper-untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That's the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!"(43).

When Bakha goes out to beg the food for himself and his family, he is turned away with a curse whereas a lazy sadhu is treated as an honoured guest by the woman. Critically sketching the hypocritical Indian society, C.D.Narsimhaiah writes, "the hypocrisy goes on the novelists lets us witness the cry of defilement, pollution and a torrent of abuse great Bakha as he goes out to beg the food for himself and his family" (157).

The explicit portrayal of Bakha is an evidence of Anand's social concern. He sketches Bakha as neither static nor passive. He changes, grows and attains self realization but can not transform his resentment into action as he is socially powerless. There are many episodes where we can watch Bakha is caught between a world which despises him and a will which fights against it and to keep him whole. The people who ill-treat him think that he is a superior to his job because of his cleanliness and his 'exotic dress' gives the look of distinction. Anand sincerely wishes the eradication of the evil of untouchability in Indian society. The reformatory enthusiasm and sympathetic heart impels Anand to suggest the spiritual and the practical- ideational solutions to scourge the untouchability.

Anand in the conclusion of the novel carefully examines the various possible solutions which include- religious conversion, rapid industrialization and the Gandhian way. Anand believes that introducing 'Flush System' works as a desire image of the change. Anand agrees neither with Hutchinson's religious programme of equality by conversion nor the slow regeneration of traditional Hindu society in the Gandhian way. Bakha steps out of the promises and hopes in machine because he feels it brings change in his life. Bakha's rebellion is meaningful in a secular democracy.

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